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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3534  
INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY 6120  
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES PRIORITY 1059  
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ PRIORITY 1755  
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 9961  
RUEHMU/AMEMBASSY MANAGUA PRIORITY 1044  
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 1827  
RUEHSN/AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR PRIORITY 0821  
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO PRIORITY 3320  
RUEHAO/AMCONSUL CURACAO PRIORITY 0654  
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 0345  
RUEHMI/USOFFICE FRC FT LAUDERDALE PRIORITY 2883  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY  
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA PRIORITY 0545

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000663

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/10/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)

SUBJECT: CHAVEZ APPOINTS NEW COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION  
MINISTER

REF: A. 06CARACAS 00536

[1](#)B. 06CARACAS 00598

[1](#)C. 05CARACAS 00498

[1](#)D. 06CARACAS 00532

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT R. DOWNES FOR 1.4 (D)

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Summary  
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[1](#)1. (C) In a press conference on March 9, Communications and Information Minister Yuri Pimentel announced that he would be replaced by current National Assembly Deputy and major player in the Movimienta Quinta Republica (MVR), Willian Lara. Lara said his ministry would be open to the media, but took the opportunity to take a swipe at the media that are operating "outside of the constitution." Lara is a former journalist that also runs the MVR's National Tactical Command, where he organizes party infrastructure and directs electoral strategy. Lara has been a frequent critic of the opposition as well as the United States and has played the role of "attack dog" for the party. His appointment to the Minister of Communications and Information indicates that the BRV will likely increase its heavy-handed pressure on the media in Venezuela and take an even more strident tone against the United States. End Summary.

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More Media Pressure to Come  
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[1](#)2. (U) In a press conference on March 9, Communications and Information Minister Yuri Pimentel announced that he would be replaced by current National Assembly Deputy Willian Lara. The announcement comes on the heels of recent increased pressure on the media by the BRV, which has cited the "Social

Responsibility Law for Radio and Television" (Reftel A). The law asserts that the interests of society may outweigh the right to free speech in some cases, and has been condemned by local media outlets and international NGOs. During the press conference Lara said he would continue the work of Pimentel, but likely make some adjustments after he met with President Chavez. Lara claimed that the media could "count on me as a friend who is a former journalist and a ministry that will be open to journalists." However, he also used the time to take a swipe at the media saying that he "extend(s) his hand to the true media," and that "some media...often act outside of the constitution." (Note: Local media sources question the depth of his journalistic experience. End Note.)

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Attack Dog  
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13. (U) In addition to this current position as a Deputy in the National Assembly, Willian Lara also currently heads the National Tactical Command of President Chavez's party, the Movimiento Quinta Republica (MVR), where he is responsible for organizing the party infrastructure and directing the electoral strategy. Lara helped guide the MVR through the parliamentary elections in December 2005, as well as the recall referendum in 2004. Lara has established himself as a major player in the MVR and frequently plays the role of "attack dog" against Chavez's political opponents, as well as the United States. It was Lara, among others, who recently falsely accused Ambassador Brownfield of meeting with separatist groups in the state of Zulia (Reftel B). While he will resign his National Assembly seat to become minister, Lara announced that he would retain his party position and responsibilities.

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14. (U) Lara began his career as a journalist, studying at the Central Venezuela University (UCV). He entered politics in 1999 when he was elected to the National Assembly (AN) representing the state of Miranda. While in the AN, Lara lead the Commission on Interior Policy as well as the Commission for Electoral and Political Regulation. In 2000, Lara became president of the AN, a post he held until 2002.

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Corruption Allegations  
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15. (U) In 2005, Lara was accused of mishandling pension funds during his tenure as president of the AN (Reftel C). Tulio Alvarez, an outspoken critic of the government who was representing AN pensioners, accused Lara publicly of mishandling the funds. In retaliation, Lara filed a complaint against Alvarez for criminal libel, a charge for which Alvarez was eventually convicted and sentenced to two years and three months in jail (Note: Alvarez has not yet served any prison time for this sentence. End Note.)

16. (C) The future of outgoing Communications and Information Minister Yuri Pimentel is unclear. He has only served in his current post since July 2005 and declined to comment on what he would do next. Like Lara, Pimentel started his career as a journalist and has also served as the spokesman for the Venezuelan Embassy in Washington. (Comment: Media and opposition representatives indicate he was under pressure for not performing and inefficiency. The flurry of heavy-handed press releases coming from the Ministry attacking the United States, opposition governor Manuel Rosales, and opposition press was seen by observers as Pimentel's desperate attempt to retain his position. End Comment.)

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Comment  
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17. (C) The BRV has made a concerted effort to crack down on the media recently. The naming of a major party player with a history of inflammatory remarks indicates that the BRV will increase its heavy-handed approach with, what it views to be, an opposition-biased media. This is another in a series of changes to Chavez's cabinet and we expect to see more moves as the December presidential election draws near. This change, however, is different in that unlike some of the recent, more cosmetic shifts (Reftel D), this one will likely have teeth.

BROWNFIELD